

# THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

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Beckenham Public Libraries

## Sense of Responsibility

**T**YPE casting " has ruined many potentially good actors : librarians, having played the part of Poor Relation for so long, are in danger of remaining in that role, but an opportunity is approaching which, if it is grasped, may enable them to assume a place in society beyond anything imagined hitherto. This was evident at the first meeting, in April, of the United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO. On this body librarians have been allocated a substantial number of seats, and meet on equal terms leaders of thought in the fields of art, broadcasting, the cinema, education, music, journalism, and the theatre ; already they have won warm approval for their " clear-cut proposals," many of which are being implemented.

But while the Library Association has been instrumental in obtaining recognition for librarians' claims to be consulted in the programme of UNESCO, and while such leaders as the President, Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, Messrs. Irwin, McColvin, Nowell, Seymour Smith, and Welsford are able to give the library viewpoint in the deliberations of the National Commission, their work will be successful only if they receive the full support of every librarian. The time has come when libraries may, by co-operative action, play a leading part in the work of making education, science, and culture available to all. To do this, they will need both a realization of their resources and potentialities and a vision beyond the boundaries of their local authority. Parochialism will be fatal ; in every library there must be a social conscience that is aware of the world's needs.

In the library sphere Britain has a particular duty, which leaders of the profession have accepted. If every library assistant in this country gives his full understanding and support, the essential work of UNESCO may receive the backing of the people. Greater recognition and financial support, and improved status, bring increased responsibility, which must be shared by every member of the profession.

## Council Notes

**T**HE Press and Publications Committee made an early start on 3rd March for the second Council meeting of the present session. For three hours they discussed the future publishing programme of the Association and made various recommendations to Council, the most important of which was that the successful

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*Primer* series should be extended to include works on Cataloguing, Assistance to Readers, Practical Bibliography, Children's Libraries, Historical Bibliography, and Library Methods. Council approved this programme which is designed to provide a comprehensive set of primers for the Entrance and Registration student.

The Education and Library Committee reported that they had considered the results of the December, 1948, examinations and that 70% of the students who had completed correspondence courses had satisfied the examiners. They also reported that the reorganization of the Correspondence Courses to meet the needs of the new Library Association syllabus was progressing satisfactorily.

The Finance and General Purposes Committee recommended that the Divisional capitation grant be at the rate of 2s. 6d. for the first 100 members, 1s. 6d. for the next 100 members, and 1s. for all members over 200, and the Council approved. This committee also reported that £81 had been subscribed by the Association to the Mitchell Memorial Fund, and that the membership of the Association now stood at 4,600.

The full Council—with the President (Wilfred Pearson, Esq.) in the chair—considered and approved the work of the committees after they had decided to draw the attention of the Library Association to the need for qualified tutors as part-time lecturers in librarianship and also decided that the A.A.L. library should be transferred to the Library Association during the summer. The Council went on to approve the draft Annual Report but decided to refer back the proposed Divisional Rules.

An ambitious programme has been prepared for the year 1950 in celebration of the Centenary of the Public Libraries Act and the Council decided to co-ordinate their activities with those of the Library Association.

The Council wish to ensure that every member of this Association has an opportunity for meeting his, or her, colleagues, and of joining them in both professional and social activities on a Divisional basis. It was with obvious pleasure that the Council agreed to the formation of a North Wales Division at the request of over thirty members in the area. Miss K. M. Cooks, of Llandudno, arranged the Inaugural Meeting, and interested members should communicate with her. (See below. *Ed.*)

Fifteen Divisions of the Association now cover England and Wales, and with this achievement to hearten them and encourage them to further efforts the members of the Council left for home.

E. A. C.

### CROESAW CYNNES I RHANBARTH GOGLEDD CYMRU

Welcome to the new Division in North Wales! At its Inaugural Meeting, held at Llandudno on 13th April, a Committee was appointed with Mr. I. G. ab Iorwerth (Denbighshire County) as Chairman and Mr. T. R. Lewis (Llandudno) as Hon. Secretary-Treasurer. The President attended on behalf of the Council and gave an address outlining the history and aims of the A.A.L. He was supported by Mr. F. C. Shepherd, Chairman of the South Wales Division, who brought a welcome from the South. The Association are indebted to Miss K. M. Cooks, Borough Librarian, Llandudno, for the excellent arrangements made for the meeting and for the generous hospitality provided.

## Neglected Aspects of Public Libraries\*

G. BERNARD SHAW

THE importance of public libraries can hardly be exaggerated; yet it is seldom apparent to that most influential but most disastrous of public councillors, the practical man of business. He is revolted by the spectacle of a pretentious building, and a huge and costly collection of books, with seating accommodation for from fifty to two hundred people, and one solitary reader who is not even fashionably dressed. What wicked waste it seems! And yet to anyone who knows, that solitary man is a far more satisfactory spectacle than a crowd of young persons devouring the latest Tarzan. A crowded public library is an absurdity, like a crowded laboratory or observatory. The people who clamour for it are clamouring for something very different: to wit, a crowded popular reading-room. I have nothing to say against reading-rooms any more than against sleeping-rooms (most reading-rooms contrive the double debt to pay); but I must insist that a reading-room is not in the classic sense a library. A library is a place in which the makers of books work: a reading-room is a space in which ordinary men and women pass the time by reading books, just as they do in railway carriages. The purpose of the reading-room is to enable people of moderate means to share books as they share a towel on a rolling pin, and thus to read fifty novels at the cost of one. The purpose of a library is to enable poor scholars and men of letters, whose traditional lot is "toil, envy, want, the patron, and the gaol," to consult books which are storehouses of learning, books which they can no more afford to buy than a chemist can afford to buy a pound of radium. Such men form a very small percentage, or even per millage, of the population; but the quality of the books in the reading-room, which means the quality of the taste of the readers, depends finally on the library and on the unfashionably dressed man who may often be its sole occupant. The debt of British literature, and indeed of every department of British culture, to the British Museum Library is incalculable. I myself worked in its reading-room daily for about eight years; and oh (if I may quote Wordsworth) the difference to me! And that difference was a difference to all the readers of my books and of my contributions to journalism, as well as to all the spectators of my plays: say, to be excessively cautious, not less than a million people.

It is not necessary to go into the question whether the effect on all these people has been for good or evil. It may be that it would have been better for myself and them if I had never been born. But that is neither here nor there for the present point, which is, that the work done in the world by the library cannot be measured by the number of people visibly seated in it. I will go so far as to say that if a public library did not attract even one reader from the outside, its existence would be justified by the presence of its librarian and his official staff. And it never comes quite to that. There are always two or three readers to keep the place in countenance. And if (to take actual cases) one of them is a Carlyle and another a Karl Marx, the results may range from the extension of the English Factory Code throughout the whole modern world to a European war and half a dozen revolutions. This may seem a questionable recommendation; but as long as the people are impressed only by sensational events like wars and revolutions, and take unmixed benefactions thanklessly as a matter of course, it would be useless to cite the many library workers on whose influence there is no stain

\* We are pleased to acknowledge the courtesy of both author and editor in permitting the inclusion of this contribution, which originally appeared in *The New Republic* for 21st December, 1921.

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of blood. From Plato and Pythagoras to Descartes and Einstein there have been single men who would have justified all that the British Museum cost by spending one week of their lives in it ; but the public knows them only as unhappy wretches who never knew the joy of jazzing with ladies of the beauty chorus every night and the daring adventure of buying cocaine for them every day.

The moral is clear : let us have libraries whether they are empty or full. And do not confuse their high function with that of the reading divan which polices our cities for us by enabling people to read about crimes and vices instead of going out into the streets and practising them. Do not forget, either, that though this is a very desirable substitution, it is the reverse of desirable in the case of good deeds and virtues. Just as reading about crimes does not make us criminals but rather causes any propensities we may have in that direction to waste themselves harmlessly through the imagination, so reading about high virtues does not make us heroes and heroines ; it wastes our heroic impulses in precisely the same manner. Therefore it is very questionable whether reading-rooms should contain any good books. Rather should they be stocked with the Newgate Calendar, detective stories, lives of Cartouche, Lacenaire, Charles Peace, Moll Flanders, and all the most infamous characters in fact or fiction. And when the readers, in the disgust and satiety produced by a debauch of such literature, go to the reading-room librarian and say " For heaven's sake give me a book about a saint or a hero : I am sick to death of these stupid malefactors," it should be the duty of that librarian to say, " No, my son (or my daughter as the case may be) ; the proper sphere of virtue is the living world. Go out and do good until you feel wicked again. Then come back to me ; and I will discharge all your evil impulses for you without hurting anyone by a batch of thoroughly bad books." Moral : do not listen to the people who wish to purify public bookshelves : they are sitters on safety valves.

## Facts About Our Fiction

ARTHUR WRIGHT

" . . . the literary standard in the provision of some fiction appeared unnecessarily low and in direct opposition to the high sentiments expressed by all librarians in their speaking and writing."—(Leon Carnovsky in *The Library Association Record*, January, 1949.)

This is the view of an observer who admits to having had little opportunity to view English libraries at great length. Nevertheless we can safely assume that this state of our fiction shelves was not pointed out to him ; from a superficial examination it must have been only too obvious. Indeed, all librarians who have studied English libraries closely and assistants who have attempted to work intelligently in many of them could restate this opinion a little less kindly.

It is a remarkable fact that whereas modern tendencies in library planning have resulted in light, colourful and spacious buildings, policies of book acquisition rather than book selection have filled them with stock that is a deterrent rather than an incentive to reading. To-day the fiction shelves of many libraries present a depressing array of the unwanted, wearing out their last years as collectors of dust, awaiting the time when a salvage drive will remove them to their ultimate doom. The average reader confronted by these shelves of unattractive, unknown novels finds little consolation in the librarian's apology that " we have better books but unfortunately they are ' out ' at the moment."

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This dead stock remains a dreary monument to wasted money, its original selection a triumph for the bookseller and a tragedy for the librarian and his readers. The seeming reluctance of librarians to discard these books, which have served what little purpose they originally had, only adds to the hopelessness of the situation.

This is not merely the "fiction controversy once again," for when a foreign visitor can offer such a serious criticism of our library service and directly question either the integrity or the ability of our librarians, it is time that we took full blame or credit for the books in our libraries and stopped offering the time-worn excuses of the inadequacy of the book fund and the limitations imposed by the library committee. Let us rather admit our mistakes, purge our stocks, and rebuild with a policy based on the assumption that the average reader *would* read better books than he has hitherto been offered.

For the provision of this "unnecessarily low" standard of fiction various excuses have been put forward. These can be grouped roughly under two headings: "Ground Bait" and "Tune and Piper," both based largely on the supposition that the librarian's hand is forced by the irresistible demand of his readers. Yet as long ago as 1934 Mr. T. E. Callander, then Librarian of Finchley, said that some readers "had for the most part asked for rubbish because they had not sufficient knowledge of books to ask for any more solid books." If this still applies, and all librarians who have any real contact with readers must agree that it does, then by and large the fiction selection in the average public library is based on a pathetic fallacy.

That the demand for fiction exists no one would deny, but that this demand is for rubbish must be contested immediately. If our provision of fiction is to show any glimmerings of intelligence at all, we as librarians must encourage readers to express their desires, try to discover their real needs, and always offer the best on our shelves and encourage the use of it.

To encourage readers to express their desires, framed notices advising them to "Ask for information," however well executed, are of little value. The fiction reader, conscious that he is reading for pleasure, is often loth to waste the librarian's time. Even when he does make an enquiry he will frequently fail to pursue it unless given every encouragement. The offer of any more service than the perfunctory wave of the hand in the direction of the shelves is met with the immediate "That's all right! I can find it now; I know you're busy." This feeling of the triviality and unimportance of fiction has been fostered by librarians both in their unimaginative bulk buying of it and their offhand treatment of its readers in the dismissal of their right to reserve novels. We can only gauge the true nature of the demand when we have in operation a reader's adviser's desk continually staffed by qualified assistants, to whom every borrower is introduced on joining.

The reader's adviser in his introductory talk should make the new borrower feel at home, give him enough information for his immediate needs, and tell him that "It is our primary job to see that you get the books you need. So if you cannot find what you want, come and ask for help." Too few readers are aware that they can influence the selection of books, too few attempt to get what they really need, and many lack the ability to express their needs at all clearly. When the reader's adviser is asked for a book on "Engineering" (or any other broad subject) he attempts to find out what the reader really wants, what branch, what aspect, what information. Requests for fiction, however trivial, must be dealt with just as carefully, the reader shown how to use the library intelligently, and an attempt made to understand his real needs.

In order that a visit to our libraries should not give one the impression that our

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fiction-buying policy was to sponsor the unsuccessful living and to pay royalties to the dead, we should adopt a policy that will ensure that our stock is so saturated with good fiction that at least a representative cross-section can always be found on the shelves. No successful tradesman would dress his window with the residue odd lots and unsaleables of the past twenty years. Our shelves are our shop windows, and we should fill them with samples of the good things inside our stock.

This is not a plea that we should elevate fiction to supreme importance, but that we should recognize it as a serious contribution to imaginative literature and use as much discrimination in its choice as we expend on the selection of subject books. It does not mean that the fiction shelves should be full of Charles Morgan, Virginia Woolf, Christopher Isherwood, Dorothy Richardson, and James Joyce, nor that they should be confined to the Merediths, the Hardys, the Galsworthys, the Eliots, or the Austens, but that such authors as Bates, Greene, Hemingway, Huxley, Maugham, and Priestley should be purchased to saturation point, with considerable representation of such writers as Bromfield, Buck, Brophy, Shute, Spring, Sinclair, and the like.

One difficulty arises here. These books are not easily purchased; they are seldom offered as cheap secondhand, cheap rebinds, or cheap anything else. Their value must be recognized on publication and enough copies must be purchased to cover current and (if possible) future needs. Needs can be defined as enough copies to ensure that at least one can always be found on the shelves. Obviously to buy these authors is only a step towards popularizing them. Many thrillers are borrowed because the choice is often between them and fiction of ancient vintage and unknown brand. When we provide the best titles of good modern authors we find that those which are known either through screen or radio are issued immediately. We must therefore use display to issue those titles that are not so well known. To the reader who is uncertain of his requirements, or to the reader who knows what he wants but cannot associate it with authors and titles, display is an essential part of the library service. A display should be a selection of books having something more in common than that they are "Recent Additions" or "New Novels." We can forget about the new books; their issue value is intrinsic anyway. Let us rather place the accent on quality. We should build up displays in which the reader has faith; set a standard and keep to it. We should not recommend books that have not been out for a long time, unless they come within the standards prescribed for our displays.

It is not easy to maintain fiction display if one lays down rigid standards. Months of persistent work and careful selection may be needed before the display will be used consistently. Neglect of a display will immediately shatter confidence: it can mean allowing strayed books to remain there long enough to be chosen by an unsuspecting reader.

All this means concentrated effort and work by qualified assistants, but the reward is great. Readers leave the library with books that they know they are going to like, rather than something they have picked from the shelves in the hope that it will be a little better than their last choice. Finally, we should really put into practice just three of those canons of book selection which seem only to be learned to satisfy examiners.

We must duplicate the best rather than acquire the many. We must purchase good novels in dozens; even then only a few hundred people can read a particular title in a year—all too few when borrowers are numbered in thousands. We must always buy good editions of classics and the best books in the best editions, not cheap reprints with poor paper and eye-torturing print, for cheap books become most expensive if they wear themselves out on the shelves.

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We must buy suitable library editions. By applying our knowledge of what is a good book physically capable of repaying in issues the money spent on it, we shall find that some publishing houses and much of the lighter fiction automatically exclude themselves from any consideration whatsoever.

It is perhaps fitting to add here the opinion of a great librarian. Although stated many years ago it has appeared to have passed unheeded by the majority of librarians. To stock rubbish is a craven policy: to provide only what we as librarians think to be great literature is literary prohibition. A middle policy is founded on the belief that people will read intelligently. Not only give the reading public what they'd like if they knew of it, but also help them to know of it.

Can we ask ourselves if it is the public library that by offering rubbish creates a public for it? It is far easier to buy "tripe" in bulk with block orders than to know something about each of the titles that we purchase. Could it possibly be our ability as librarians that Professor Carnovsky is questioning?

### Library Surveys and Analysis

M. S. MOORE

"**F**IGURES do not lie" one man will tell you: "Statistics are the biggest liars" says another. What is the truth? The use of the survey has become so extensive of recent years that a good deal of pruning is needed before we can judge of either its worth or its limitations.

Are there too many small, disconnected and uncontrolled surveys in progress? There have been various types of reading surveys made in recent years, in Bristol, in Leeds, in Keighley, and in Warrington, to mention but a few. But all these surveys and analyses have been unco-ordinated and some, perhaps, conducted on too small a sample of the public to have more than interest value. The results of such analytical surveys could be extremely useful to a librarian—first, as an indication of the tastes of the neighbourhoods with which he is concerned, or is about to be concerned, and secondly, as an indication of progress in book selection and publicity.

It has been said that librarianship is not a profession because it is not an exact science. But the days when the public librarian was little more than a custodian of books are long since past: since then we have seen the era of extensive and intensive publicity. This publicity, together with compulsory education, has resulted in enormous increases in the public use of books, with a consequent rise in the size of bookstocks and of financial provision made for them. It was recently calculated that there are over a million books in the stocks of public and county libraries to-day. Now is the time to carry the art of librarianship a stage further. We have the books, we have the public, we are well versed in publicity. Let us now make of librarianship a more exact science.

All librarians have those unused books in their reserve bookstacks which, nevertheless, 'may be wanted at some time.' It is certain that fashions do change, that emphasis of interests does alter. But how many of those books never have been well-used? The librarian of a small library or reference collection knows that the use of his bookstock, and its value, can be trebled if the staff have a detailed knowledge of the contents of the books and pamphlets and can bring all relevant information to the notice of readers. It is a practice already of long standing in special libraries to circularise members of the staff with information of all new printed material dealing



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with their particular subjects. Some of the larger public libraries have produced a printed card on which their readers are invited to mark off subjects of interest to them, so that they may be advised of additions in these fields. But this latter is a hit or miss method ; it serves mainly the more vociferous individual who is already well able to care for himself. It is a dangerous system, for it is likely to suggest to the librarian that a certain subject is of greater interest in his district than in fact it is. Let him, rather, base his assessment of reader interest on as wide an analysis of reader needs as possible.

The study of reading interests may be done by two methods : (1) Survey, (2) Analysis.

### SURVEY

It is comparatively easy, and very instructive, to survey children through the schools : adults are more difficult. If the district is well served with societies of varying types, a questionnaire put concurrently to both library borrowers and members of clubs and societies (who may or may not be library users) would give a large enough percentage of completed papers from which to draw a deduction.

The object of the survey should be carefully considered, and definite principles established in the librarian's mind before he attempts to draw up his questionnaire. Does he want to find out what is read in general, or in a particular class or by a particular group ; what people like about the library, what they would like changed, or if they would welcome a new or different emphasis in the book selection ?

It is essential to know something of the background of the reader if the final figures are not to lie. For example, if the library area is a combination of a poor working-class area and a well-to-do suburban area, the borrowers may not be evenly divided. The existing bookstock may draw in more of one type of borrower than of the other. If all the householders in the suburban area are keen gardeners, their vote may be heavy for gardening books. The more overcrowded area may not have gardens, and consequently the people in this area have no interest in gardening books, so that a vote of 70 per cent. in favour of gardening books would only mean that already the library appealed more to one section of the population than another. To summarise :

(1) There must be a question on occupation (from which residence will in most cases be adduced).

(2) It cannot be assumed that people will take very long over answering a questionnaire (or, conversely, the shorter it is the greater number of people are likely to answer it.) Nor will they wish to give too much thought to it. It is a help if the questions are so framed that they can be answered by crossing out. They are best drawn up on such lines as :

(a) What type of fiction do you prefer ? Romance. Detective. Adventure. Family stories. Classics. Put a tick through those preferred.

(b) And similarly for non-fiction.

(3) All questionnaires could with advantage carry the simple questions :

(a) What is your favourite fiction book ?

(b) What is your favourite non-fiction book ?

for a librarian can learn more of the mental and cultural standard of a reader from one such answer, if honestly given, than from a large number of generalisations (as in 2a).

These four questions are nearly all that is needed as a basis for a questionnaire. An obvious further question that springs to mind, what is the favourite author, may be answered in (3a) or (3b).

A questionnaire as brief as this could be answered in a couple of minutes, and many



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people might be induced to complete it on the spot. The experience of Leeds in February, 1944, when a questionnaire issued to 1,151 borrowers was returned by only 215, proves the necessity for catching the reader's co-operation at once.

Any further questions should be developed according to a preconceived plan. Should the library wish to build up and circulate more widely its sociological section, with books on specific modern aspects of the subject, the type of reader's interest to be expected could be evoked. If it is desired to assess the amount of demand and exact requirements for a commercial or technical section, a further selection of questions should be framed. Similarly, the public's reaction to the library service provided, the supply of periodicals, and so on, can be elicited.

Such a questionnaire should, preferably, be issued over a period of time, say a week at least, through the library, so that a larger section of the public could be tapped than that visiting the library on any one day.

The surveying of children in school, if done with the co-operation of the teaching staff, can be a more leisurely affair. Something of the child's background, general interests, reading habits, and home background can be considered. A questionnaire containing twenty questions has recently been found none too many by the writer—helpful suggestions made by members of teaching staffs after an initial experiment led to the addition of one or two questions, but not to subtraction. The questionnaire should, of course, be answered anonymously, only the child's age and (if a co-educational school) sex, being written on the paper, so that the child will answer freely and not attempt to give the answers he may think his English teacher expects.

### ANALYSIS

The method of determining reader interest by analysis of library issues, necessarily over an extended period if it is to be of true value, is one from which most librarians, on first thought, will shrink appalled. But, while the statistics resulting from a survey will depend for their authenticity upon the proper choice of milieu for the survey, and a sufficient sampling over a wide enough cross-section of the population—unfortunately a matter to some extent of chance, as all returns made will be purely voluntary—the results of analysis are subject to a greater control, although limited in extent to those readers who already use the libraries. As an indication of what may be done by perseverance and enthusiasm the instance of Keighley may be cited, where an analysis was made for the whole six months between October, 1946, and April, 1947, in which the subjects of books borrowed were analysed under 100 different headings—on the face of it a formidable task.

Few of the subject headings used at Keighley are to hand, but the few known at once raise a big question. On what basis shall the subject headings be chosen, apart from the obvious ones of any special interests of the area under review? Every librarian is bound to make a different selection, so that, as terms will be found not to be mutually exclusive, no true comparison of results will be possible. The Keighley librarian reports that there was "a good demand for . . . Politics . . . Central and Local Government . . ." How easy for another librarian, laying the foundations for a similar analysis, to place these two together. Again, Keighley reports "subjects in little demand included Palæontology (fossils) . . ."; how many librarians would choose this as one of 100 main headings? One obvious starting point in making a selection, the hundred main divisions of Dewey, has certain disadvantages, in that aviation, electrical engineering and radar, the motor industry, mining, shipbuilding, printing, accountancy, and so on, would not be included.

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It is suggested that a standard list of 50 or 100 subjects for reading analysis should be drawn up and made available to all librarians, to which could be added, where necessary, a number of detailed headings to meet particular local needs. By this means, valuable comparisons on a national scale could be made.

Although the reading population in different areas may differ enormously, the results of numerous surveys and analyses, taken all over the country and governed by some suitably elastic rules of standardisation could give librarians a sounder knowledge of the people they serve than any amount of intuitive reasoning. Intuition works very well on a small scale, but the modern public library with—in many cases—its manifold branches, has outgrown it.

All statistics need assessing before they become of value, and in assessing the limiting factors of environment, local interests and occupations can be taken into account. Thus the results of one area, in comparison with another not too dissimilar, might well bring to light outstanding differences both in supply and demand. The poorer services would learn from the richer, and the richer themselves find much useful information in the results. The labour of tabulating statistics is always somewhat onerous, but the value and interest of the results is well worth the labour.

## Correspondence

### THE SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

Mr. R. S. Walker, *Hon. Secretary, Lanark County Libraries Staff Guild*, writes :

"In consequence of the recent issue of invitations to join the Library Association, we should like to place before you the following viewpoints.

"While it is true that library authorities 'usually recruit their staffs from young people leaving secondary schools in the locality,' it is also true that some young people are recruited who left school without having gained a School Certificate. The disadvantages of employment under these conditions may not always be obvious, but the result is invariably the same. Contact with the public and experience of general library work naturally arouse in these persons a desire to qualify themselves professionally, but they are frustrated by not being eligible to attempt the entrance examination.

"It may be maintained that uncertificated members of staff can, if keen to do so, attend classes with a view to taking University preliminary examinations and thus gain the necessary qualifications for eligibility. Yet how many of these are able to attend classes if, as is common, their duties last until 8 p.m. or later? Only in a few instances could this be remotely possible.

"Mere destructive criticism, however, is in itself insufficient. In the case of those already in this unfortunate position, the remedy lies, in our view, in making the entrance examination more strictly an examination for entrance to our profession. At present, a would-be examinee requires one year's practical experience and a School Certificate before being eligible to sit the examination. Would it not be practicable to allow all junior members of staff who have completed (say) three years' service, to be eligible to sit the examination, irrespective of previous educational attainments? There is no suggestion that the standard of examination be lowered. If, on the other hand, a junior assistant has served for three years on routine duties and still wishes to enter the profession, surely he or she has the spirit needed in its members and should, therefore, be encouraged? If in the examination he or she is unsuccessful, then the professional standards have not been lowered, but indeed emphasised.

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"A comparison between the numbers employed in public libraries and the membership of the Library Association would, we feel sure, reveal a considerable discrepancy which could largely be accounted for by the conditions outlined above.

"On behalf of this Staff Guild, therefore, we submit these observations for your consideration, in the knowledge that they apply to a not inconsiderable percentage of junior assistants employed in the library systems of this country."

### SCHOOLS OF LIBRARIANSHIP

Mr. Paul Sykes, A.L.A., *Assistant, Manchester Public Libraries*, writes :

"The 'mental balance sheet' concerning the pros and cons of full time library schools in 'Student's Problems' (Library Assistant, Jan-Feb 1949) interested me greatly, especially as I am in my second consecutive year at the Manchester School of Librarianship. Whilst agreeing with all items on the credit side I should like to reassure all would-be students on the question of 'loss of a year's experience.'

"Without doubt all students acquire more experience in a year at a library school than they would by remaining in their own library. At the Manchester School the curriculum includes a nine weeks' intensive tour of all the departments in the Manchester Public Libraries System. Visits are also made to many other libraries, including Lancashire County H.Q.; Chetham's Library; Manchester University Library; the I.C.I. Library at Blackley; and to many Public Libraries in the N.W. area.

"Students also learn to find their voice in discussion, and in addition to formal lectures many librarians, including Dominion and foreign representatives, give to the student a breadth of outlook that an assistant working in his own library cannot hope to achieve.

"Dr. Walford suggests that what is required in the early years of training is 'variety and depth' of experience. It would seem that a course of full time professional training provides such experience to a much greater extent than the daily round of routine duties carried out by most junior assistants.

"As the 'loss of a year's experience' of this nature is therefore outweighed by the advantages of full time training, I suggest that it might well be removed from the debit side of the 'mental balance sheet.'"

Mr. A. R. Foster, A.L.A., *Assistant, Birkenhead Public Library*, writes :

"As a Final student in his second year at the School of Librarianship in Manchester may I bring to your notice misleading statements in the article by Dr. A. J. Walford, in the January-February issue of the *Library Assistant*.

"There is no loss of experience while attending a library school, for a broader conception of professional work is obtained there, as well as an increased understanding of methods and policies. During a year at a library school the student has a year's experience, while at the average library the correspondent student merely re-experiences a year of work in a library."

### VERTICAL FILES

Mr. F. G. B. Hutchings, F.L.A., *Librarian, Leeds Public Libraries*, writes :

"In your March-April issue Mr. McDonald, in reviewing the examination question papers for Final, Part 2, Question 6, states : "The vertical file is the best and cheapest

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method of arranging a collection of papers . . . It may be the cheapest ; it is certainly not the best. The vertical file does not easily declare its contents and has size limitations. Manufacturers have been exercising their wits for years to overcome the former. The merit of the vertical file is that it economises space. But the box file arranged on shelves and properly labelled is more coherent, as are folders arranged horizontally with their backs declaring their contents."

### Correspondence Course Successes—

December, 1948

In accordance with past practice, the Hon. Education Secretaries have analysed the examination successes of Correspondence Course students who sat the December, 1948 Examinations. Of those who completed their respective courses, the percentage of successes was 71, which compares very favourably with the average percentage of passes for the examinations as a whole, which was 52.

The details of courses and passes in the individual parts of the syllabus are as follows :

| CORRESPONDENCE COURSE CANDIDATES |                 |                  |           |        |          |                      | Percentage of passes all candidates for L.A. Exams. |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------|--------|----------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
|                                  | No. of students | Completed Course | Sat Exam. | Passed | Failed   | Percentage of passes |                                                     |
| ENTRANCE .. ..                   | 216             | 130              | 127       | 99     | 28       | 78                   | 66                                                  |
| REGISTRATION                     |                 |                  |           |        |          |                      |                                                     |
| A.1 .. ..                        | 82              | 24               | 24        | 12     | 12       | 50                   | 33                                                  |
| A.2 .. ..                        | 80              | 26               | 26        | 13     | 13       | 50                   | 43                                                  |
| B.3 .. ..                        | 48              | 19               | 21        | 18*    | 3        | 86                   | 72                                                  |
| B.4 .. ..                        | 48              | 19               | 21        | 13     | 4        | 62                   | 61                                                  |
|                                  |                 |                  |           |        | (4 ref.) |                      |                                                     |
| C.5 .. ..                        | 65              | 23               | 26        | 21     | 5        | 81                   | 48                                                  |
| C.6 .. ..                        | 47              | 22               | 19        | 13     | 6        | 66                   | 65                                                  |
| FINAL                            |                 |                  |           |        |          |                      |                                                     |
| Part 1 .. ..                     | 32              | 12               | 11        | 6*     | 5        | 55                   | 41                                                  |
| Part 2 .. ..                     | 22              | 5                | 7         | 3      | 4        | 43                   | 37                                                  |
| Part 3a .. ..                    | 26              | 8                | 10        | 8      | 2        | 80                   | 56                                                  |
| Part 3b .. ..                    | 4               | 1                | 1         | —      | 1        | —                    | 33                                                  |
| Part 3c .. ..                    | 2               | 2                | 2         | 2      | —        | 100                  | 100                                                 |
| Part 4a .. ..                    | 19              | 4                | 7         | 5      | 2        | 71                   | 65                                                  |
| Part 5c .. ..                    |                 |                  |           |        |          | —                    |                                                     |
| Classification                   | 1               | 1                | —         | —      | —        | —                    | } 25                                                |
| Cataloguing                      | 1               | —                | —         | —      | —        | —                    |                                                     |
| Part 5d .. ..                    | 1               | 1                | 1         | 1      | —        | 100                  | 100                                                 |
| TOTALS                           |                 |                  |           |        |          |                      |                                                     |
| Entrance .. ..                   | 216             | 130              | 127       | 99     | 28       | 78                   | 66                                                  |
| Registration ..                  | 370             | 133              | 137       | 90*    | 43       | 66                   | 47                                                  |
|                                  |                 |                  |           |        | (4 ref.) |                      |                                                     |
| Final .. ..                      | 108             | 34               | 39        | 25*    | 14       | 64                   | 50                                                  |
| GRAND TOTAL ..                   | 694             | 297              | 303       | 214    | 85       | 71                   | 52                                                  |
|                                  |                 |                  |           |        | (4 ref.) |                      |                                                     |

\* Includes one honours.

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It will be seen, therefore, that anyone who takes a correspondence course with the A.A.L., and completes it, has an excellent chance of success, the figures for these Examinations giving us three chances of success in four. The Education Committee is, however, rather perturbed at the large number of students who enrolled for the courses and failed to complete them; this is particularly noticeable in the Registration and Final courses. Of Entrance candidates, 40 per cent. failed to complete the course, but in view of commitments for military service, resignations from the library service, domestic circumstances, etc., this figure is not unduly high. At the Registration stage, however, we find that the number of students who failed to stay the course represents 74 per cent. of original enrolments, and at the Final stage some 69 per cent. are lost by the wayside. It would be interesting to know the reasons why such a large proportion of students gave up. Is it the great difference in the standard required between Entrance and Registration which causes students to despair; do they get tired of librarianship and seek pastures new, or do they turn to other methods of study? Such a wastage suggests that records might be maintained for twelve months, of all students who originally enrolled and then gave up; if these were analysed at the end of the period, the results might be interesting not only to the Education Committee, but to the profession at large.

E. V. C.

## Students' Problems

A. J. WALFORD

So far the candidate for the L.A. Entrance Examination has received little individual consideration from writers on librarianship. Mr. Sharp's admirable and conscientious little book, *Approach to librarianship*, was published fifteen years ago and is sadly out of line with the requirements of the post-war L.A. syllabus. It is time, too, that the needs of candidates who propose to sit for the 1950 examinations were beginning to be catered for, since serious studying to this end will commence this autumn.

With a considerable degree of warmth, then, one welcomes the appearance of Mr. Duncan Gray's *Fundamentals of librarianship*.<sup>1</sup> The reader does not have to dip very deeply into this latest volume of the Practical Library Handbook series to realise that here is a first-rate guide to place in the hands of the newcomer to librarianship. It is written in an eminently readable style and its nineteen chapters touch upon an astonishingly wide variety of topics: library committees, finance, book selection, accessioning and processing, classification and cataloguing, stocktaking, bookbinding, registration of borrowers, bye-laws and regulations, issue methods, reference libraries, co-operation (both regional and national), library reports and statistics, publicity and, finally, the activities of the Library Association.

But what of the newcomer to the L.A. examinations, for whom this book is avowedly written? It must be emphasised at once that this slim volume is no passport for the Entrance examinee. With some degree of closeness the book does follow the "Library organisation and method" section of the revised syllabus for the Entrance Examination; but less than 20 pages are devoted to classification and cataloguing, which form the equally important second section of this syllabus. The latter calls for a grasp of the theoretical bases of classification: what, for example, we mean by Division, as opposed

<sup>1</sup> GRAY, DUNCAN. *Fundamentals of librarianship: an introduction for the use of candidates preparing for the Entrance Examination of the Library Association*. 1949. (Allen and Unwin, 8s. 6d.)

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to Classification. Mr. Duncan Gray does not deal with this problem directly; nor, in the case of cataloguing, does he throw any light on the difference between main and added entries, between *see* and *see also* references. These are fundamental issues; they are always plaguing the young assistant; they are specifically stated in the Entrance Examination syllabus. In discussing classification, Mr. Gray is content to give the Huxley definition of Classification, and then to proceed with the nature of book classification, particularly its notation and index. In the case of cataloguing, he deals with the various types and kinds of catalogue, gives useful examples of A.A. Code rules and then discusses the printed book-list and central cataloguing.

The third section of the Entrance Examination syllabus—Reference material and methods—is even more summarily dismissed in the pages of *Fundamentals of librarianship*. Mr. Gray mentions the types of material which have to be handled in the reference department, giving a few examples; he also gives an indication of the nature of reference work, including the use of the photostat and microfilm. To have contrived to make all these points in the small space at his disposal is admirable, but it will not satisfy the needs of the Entrance student who, according to the new requirements, has to acquire an intimate knowledge of twenty specified works of reference.

At the time when Mr. Duncan Gray was writing *Fundamentals of librarianship*—in mid-1947 apparently—the draft revised L.A. syllabus was, it is true, still in embryo. But there is surely every reason why the student should expect a book published in 1949 to show some conformity to the syllabus which he must study in detail? The draft revised syllabus appeared in mimeographed form on 21st November, 1947. It is a pity that use could not have been made of it before this book—avowedly for the Entrance candidate—went to press.

Even so, Mr. Gray has failed to strike a balance between the various sections of the Entrance Examination syllabus under the regime even which obtained at the time he was writing. In that syllabus as much prominence was given to Classification and Cataloguing, and to Reference Material and Methods, as to Library Organisation and Procedure. Why did not Mr. Gray call this contribution—and it is a very useful contribution—*Fundamentals of Public Library Organisation and Method*? It is to be hoped that the author will make a point of striking a truer balance among the three sections of librarianship which he aspires to introduce, in a second edition of this attractive little book.

Two small points of inaccuracy call for mention. In a footnote on page 90, the author refers to the printed catalogue of the London School of Economics. He obviously has in mind the *London bibliography of the social sciences* which, originally at least was a union catalogue of ten London libraries specialising in various branches of sociology and economics, although the London School was, naturally, the major contributor. Again, on page 148, Miss Grace Kelley's name is mis-spelt "Kelly." I mention this chiefly because this name is so frequently incorrectly written.

Lengthy and considered reviews of *Introduction to reference books*, by A. D. Roberts,<sup>1</sup> will already have appeared elsewhere. A word may not be out of place here, with the student's point of view in mind. The lectures at University College, London on which this book is based, were thought at the time to be most stimulating, and it is good to see them in print. The field covered is similar to that of J. D. Cowley's admirable little *The use of reference material* (Grafton, 1937), although this book by Roberts is twice the length. It does not entirely supersede the Cowley, which is still valuable for its

<sup>1</sup> ROBERTS, A. D. *Introduction to reference books*. 1948. (Library Association, 12s.; 9s. to members.)

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information on G.A.Z., G.Z.V., Heinsius, Hinrichs, Kayser, and a number of other bibliographical tools.

*Introduction to reference books* is a first-class book, so far as it goes, and the "References" given at the end of each chapter are most welcome. But the candidate for the Registration and Final examinations will do well to note what it does not cover. So far as foreign countries are concerned, only contemporary bibliographical tools are listed. Thus, no guides to German or French incunabula will be found; nor, in the American field, will there be any references to Evans or Sabin.

Equally important is the avoidance of the field of special subject bibliography. The *Industrial arts index*, *Engineering index*, the *ASLIB Booklist*, Dutcher's *Guide to historical literature*: details of these and many others must be sought elsewhere.

This is not to detract from the great value of this *Introduction*, which is full of good things. It provides in Chapter 11, for instance, our best contribution to date on Government publications. But it has limitations for the student; it warns him once, again, that he must not nail his colours to one mast—if by that we mean concentrating on one book. In preparing for his examinations, the student should be prepared to scan and evaluate as many of the relevant text-books as he can acquire. After a time he will be able to decide which of them is his most suitable tool—(a) for reference purposes; (b) for continuous use; and (c) for revision. Even then, he may well find that no one book will meet his demands under (b). He may even, finally, rely chiefly on his own notes and lecture notes, drawn from a dozen or more sources. So few students seem to appreciate until quite late in their careers as students how necessary this form of domestic book-selection is!

## Books for Bookmen

Benet, William Rose, ed. *Reader's encyclopedia: an encyclopedia of world literature and the arts*. 1948. (Harrap, 30s.)

Collins, Howard. *Bibliquiz, or what do you know?* (Spine title: *Bibliquiz for booklovers*.) 1948. (Phoenix House, 7s. 6d.)

Reading at home, one wishes so often that the resources of a large library were to hand: an unrecognised allusion, a reference to an unknown character in fiction, and one reaches in one's mind for the book to give the answer. A number of volumes would normally be required to satisfy the range of such questions, but Mr. Benet and his assistants have provided the general reader's *vade mecum*, which brings Brewer up to date and adds much to the range of that well-used work. Selection having been inevitable in a book of this nature, omissions and emphasis give clues to the kind of reader for which it has been intended, as the following contrasts will indicate.

Lines allocated to authors vary: H. E. Bates 3, A. J. Cronin 10; Galsworthy 23, Hugh Walpole 33; Shostakovich 8, Sibelius 4; Epstein 11, Henry Moore nil; *The Times* 7, *New York Times* 19; Edmund Wilson is included, but not F. R. Leavis; Sir Laurence Olivier, but not Sir Ralph Richardson, Linotype but not Monotype. The selection of classical tags for translation seems equally arbitrary.

Obviously, it is the American general reader who is being catered for; the sociological, scientific and historical reader is not encouraged, and the bibliophile receives scant attention. Richard de Bury does not find a place, the late Holbrook Jackson is mentioned as "essayist, literary historian, editor," but his *Anatomy of bibliomania* and *The reading of books* are omitted, and Eric Gill is dismissed in three lines without a word on his contributions to typography. But the bias toward America is not necessarily a handicap when so many of the novels and memoirs read in Britain originate across the Atlantic. In reference departments it will prove its value, and for school and small branch libraries it should be indispensable, for it contains in handy form the answer to many popular queries. Here, for example, are the seven wonders of the world, the twelve tasks of Hercules, a list of Pulitzer Prize winners in literature, while relative entries under some words and numbers give explanations of nicknames and associated phrases and expressions. Under "States," for example, will be found the nicknames of the constituent states of the U.S.A. The *Encyclopedia* is more than a literary digest and encyclopedia, a biographical, classical and pseudonym dictionary; it is an aid and a stimulus to reading.



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Another American compilation comes to the rescue of the organiser of library staff party or literary circle competitions whose ideas have begun to wane. In *Bibliquiz* Mr. Collins, a regular contributor of literary puzzles to the *Saturday Review of Literature* for ten years, has collected 88 of them. The range of authors used as sources is wide, with only a slight American bias; classic writers predominate, and whoever considers himself well read should certainly submit to the ordeal by quiz from this book. As a reasonably easy one to start with, No. 38, *Transportation in Fiction*, is suggested: for the over-confident, No. 56, *Fiction's Famous Funerals*, is prescribed.

J. F. W. B.

## On the Editor's Table

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION. *Youth, communication, and libraries: papers presented before the Library Institute at the University of Chicago. August 11th-16th, 1947. Edited by Frances Henne, Alice Brooks, and Ruth Ersted.* (Chicago, A.L.A. \$3.50.)

In spite of welcome signs that librarians are at last thinking seriously of their responsibilities to children, there has not been any systematic attempt to supplement the official statement of policy (*L.A. Record*, January, 1946), by studying the needs of children in relation to present services. Our progress in this department, in fact, reflects the varieties and inequalities of the movement generally.

In the U.S.A., on the other hand, there has for some time been a definite trend towards the establishment of national standards, and a conference at Chicago in 1947 was devoted to the problems of youth work in an attempt to solve them. There were three sections: the first outlined the philosophical and psychological approach; the second showed how far books and audio-visual materials assist in the child's development; the third tried to assess the library's ability to organise these materials to the best advantage. The impression is that their aims and achievements are not only beyond ours, but are more consciously developed. An interesting survey, in the third part, of European practice will no doubt raise some controversy.

An honest attempt has been made at a scientific discussion, and many valuable suggestions are made. Yet one cannot help feeling that sometimes the attitude is so deliberately impersonal as to become inhuman; as one contributor remarks: "How convenient it would be if we could translate all of these kinds of libraries and library services into figures and total them on the adding machine." Let us hope that our literature will rather take its atmosphere from the too-rare writings of Mr. D. I. Colley.

J. A. F.

JOHNSON, B. L., & LINDSTROM, E., (eds.). *The librarian and the teacher in general education.* 1948. (American Library Association. \$2.)

This slim volume is a record of the experiment carried out at Stephens College, D.C., to make the college library an integral part of the teaching system of the college. Stephens is a junior college with about 2,200 women students which pursues a somewhat individual method in education, and has few if any counterparts in this country, but the record of its achievements has nevertheless real value to English librarians interested in similar work because of its freshness of approach.

This in fact is the main value of the book. It is certainly not a manual of college or school library practice and will not be of essential importance to examination candidates, but to librarians and teachers who are particularly concerned with the place of the library in college organisation and to all interested in ways of introducing more serious books to "teen-agers" it contains much of value.

The book is clearly written in a thoroughly interesting style. The enthusiasm of the library staff, and its willingness to try new ideas and to throw over accepted professional preconceptions are as stimulating as a sharp walk on a frosty morning.

F. A. S.

ORMEROD, JAMES. *The Burmese wife and other plays.* 1949. (Mitre Press, 7s. 6d.)

For reasons which will be understood by anyone who has studied carefully the course of poetry during the past twenty years, poets nowadays are loth to set course under the "full, proud sail" of rhetoric. Rightly or wrongly, a high pitch of eloquence has come to be associated with shallow optimism. The effect of this attitude upon poetic drama has been seriously impoverishing. The last verse plays to acknowledge a debt to the Elizabethans were Gordon Bottomley's; and even he, in his last period, abandoned the resonances of his youth for what he called "Choric plays" or chamber drama, derived from the Japanese Noh tradition. Many of us looked upon this departure as a symptom of creative exhaustion. The younger poets in writing for the stage have gone still further, deliberately flattening and abbreviating their lines to catch the tones of everyday speech. It may be that such plays as Mr. Ormerod's represent the first swing-back of the pendulum. In "Cormac and Steingerd," based on the Icelandic, he accepts the clash of wills implicit in the theme, and brings to its expressions a language that has something of the arrogant and passionate quality of the sagas. In *Periander* he has courageously adopted the Elizabethan note; but though it has living passages, the general effect is weakened by a suggestion of pastiche. Nevertheless, Mr. Ormerod's command of his medium has developed considerably since "Tristram's Tomb." It is to be regretted that the format of the book does such scant honour to its contents.

S. S.